

[Mr. Pedro Barrios]

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LIFE HISTORY OF MR. PEDRO BARRIOS

by

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I was born in the Corro in Havana in 1881. That is to say that I have 54 years.

I was brought to Key West when I had 3 years; and came to Tampa from Key West when I had 13 years.

I learned the trade of cigar-maker from that time; and with the exception of a season I had as reader, I have done nothing ("na mas") (1) else but cigars. From four years to this part I have worked two or three months during the year. From there to here, I worked one month in the water line, and now I am loader of bananas when the ships come in.

My childhood and youth slipped by peacefully. I had a father who loved me very much; and died when I had 21 years; and a mother who was very affectionate with me.

From then till now, I have done nothing but enjoy myself with baseball and fishing; two of my favorite sports; and I find myself at the age of 54 years "the life very hurried (2) — tight." (3) With sufficient years and ability, and "I do not find."

(1.) This is an apocope of nada. Nearly everyone in Ybor City uses this form of apocope before the word "mas," as in the above case. Also when asking anyone what is the matter with him, he will invariably answer "na," meaning nothing.

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(2.) Muy apurada la vida. An expression meaning that he is having a hard time.

(3.) apretada: In trying to further impress what he has said, he adds: “apretada,” meaning that it is difficult. This is a very common form of speech.

(4.) This form of shortening the speech is very common. It means “I do not find work.”

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I have very good friends, whom I esteem, and who value me.

During the time I was a baseball player there was not what there is today. They were “ninth” (novenas) of pure sports between cigar-makers: and there were many players from Havana. Among them was Alfredo Montoto, who helped me considerably. The “Red” of Ybor player, of which Martinez Ybor was president. The “optimo,” our “ninth” which was the “San Francisco.” Afterwards, I have devoted myself to fishing. I always go on fishing trips every week.

I was also and am an amateur of ballads. I composed a ballad to the ice-creams “Tropical,” and “by the low” (2) I glimpsed ten “canes,” (3) but it was a failure as I lacked putting on the tone to the time of the guitar. I did not occupy myself with finishing it. The first part of the ballad was thus: Ya se acabo el malestar Ya tengo lo que queria Pues tomo todos los dias Pues tomo todos los dias El helado Tropical. (Translation) Already my anxiety in at an end Already I have what I desired As I drink every day As I drink every day The ice-cream Tropical.

But I was “twisted,” (4) and I neither took the ten “guayos,” (5) nor anything. The “stroke of the sabre gave” (6) me no result.

(1.) This word is used to mean baseball team.

(2.) Por lo Bajo. This is an expression very much used in Ybor City. It means “at least.”

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(3.) Canas. This is a saying of Cuban origin, meaning dollars. In a way it is the equivalent to the word “bucks.” The word “canes” is only one of several ways of calling the dollar; such as: The “sweet potato,” the “[Guayacan?] (the *lignumvitae* tree, “maracas” (Cuban musical instrument.)

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(4.) Arrollaron. This idiomatic expression is very much employed here. nd is equivalent to “foiled.” When there is a discussion (and there are many) and one declares himself defeated, he will say: “me arrolaste.” (You have defeated me.)

(5.) Guayos. This is another name for the dollar.

(6.) El Sablazo. This is an expression equivalent to the idiomatic American word of “touch.”

As to the customs here: This was once a small Cuba. “All the (1) world” aided each other, but Tampa “began to cosmopolite itself.” (2) The Italians and Americans began entering here, and now it is a mixture. There were the Cubans and Spaniards. The customs were “almost almost” (3) alike to those of Spain. But there were also the typical Cuban customs. You could eat arum (melanga), you (“name”), sweet potatoes. Everything came from Cuba, and now-a-days you cannot eat it.

In the feasts of Christmas-day, there were many “rhumbitas” (4) on the streets. I remember that we formed rhumbas in the house of Puebla. We were one whole week “rhumbaring.” (5) We would come out of the factory, and go to the house of Puebla to continue the rhumba, and thus day after day. The The hubbub was so great that we even drew out a “cantico.” It was thus: “La Casa de Puebla as se desploma.” (7) (The house of Puebla collapses.)

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Christmas-eve was celebrated with much merriment. The Three Wise Men bring the toys in Cuba on January 6th, but it was never celebrated here in this way. They have always (8) come on Christmas Eve.

(1.) Todo el mundo. This is an expression equivalent to “everybody.”

(2.) Cosmopolitando. This is a misuse of the noun cosmopolite. Here it has been used as a verb.

(3.) This is another idiomatic expression very commonly used here, and means “very nearly.” (casi casi).

(4.) Rumbitas. Diminutive for rhumbas.

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(5.) Rumbiando. This is a verb of the noun “rumba.” It is very much used in Ybor City, but is not used in the sense of a rumba dance. Practically everyone in Ybor City will say (when the occasion arises) “me fui de rumba,” meaning “I went on a spree”; or “me fui a rumbiar”; “I went to have a good time.”

(6.) Cantico. Diminutive for song.

(7.) This line is repeated several times with a little shade of tone different every time.

(8.) Here he refers to the Reyes Magos (Three Wise Men.)

They were also accustomed to burning the old year here. The people would get together in many groups, and they would symbolize the old year with a puppet so that the coming of the new year would be better. As the puppet was being burned, they would say: “Vete ano malo, a ver si el que viene es [mejor?].” (Go evil year so that the coming one is better.)

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There was a Congo, who on Thursday before “asueto” (Sunday Holiday) would say: “Manana ‘viene’ (Viernes) el otro se va, y el otro, maravilla ‘ta’ la matra.” “Tomorrow Friday, the other goes, and the other, marvelous is the tree.”)

He meant that “he was going to give it to himself in big.” (1)

There is also a custom among the children, and that is when they begin to play jumping the rope, they sing this: “El patio de mi casa Es particular Llueve y se moja Como les demas. Agachato niña Vuelvete a agachar: [Que?] si no te agachas, No Puedes bailar.” The yard of my house is particular It rains and is soaked Like the other ones. Squat little girl, Squat again, If you do not squat You cannot dance.

(1.) Se la iba a dar en granda. (1) This idiomatic form of speech is very common in Ybor city. The equivalent in English would be “He was going to have a big time.”

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(2.) There is also another game which all the children in Ybor City of Spanish or Cuban parents, play. When they are playing “hide and seek,” in order to see who will be “it,” they will go through this sort of jargon: Tin marin de doos pingue Cuorara macara titiri fue paso la mula, paso Miguel Mira a ver quien fue. Tin marin of two pingue Cuara macara titiri was Passed the mule, passed Michael See who is “it.”

There is also another similar to this one, and it goes like this: Pito pito colorite Donde vas tan bonito? A la acera Verdadera Pin pan fuera. Pito pito colorite Where are you going so Pretty? To the true side-walk Pin pan out.

There is also a little song, which many of the children in Ybor City sing: Estaba la pajera pinta Sentada on su verde limon Con el pico recoge la rama, Con la rama recoge la flor Ay Dios! cuando vera mi amor? Ay Dios! cuando vera mi amor? (Translation) The spotted

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hen-bird On its green lemon was sitting. With her bill she takes the twig, With the twig she gathers the flower. Oh God! when will I see my love? Oh God! when will I see my love?

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I do not go to the church ever since I found out that the money-lenders took over the temple. (1) So notice (2) if I have gone to church. This does not mean that I do not have religion. My religion is the following: do good to others. If I know of someone who has nothing to eat, I cannot sit at the table. (3) The anguish of anyone is my anguish; I feel it as much as the one who is suffering it. (4) I do not believe in doing harm to anyone. Neither do I feel animosity against anyone.

This is my religion and the one which I impressed on my children. I am not believing in the preachers, who with their little book in the hand, and giving himself many “strokes of the breast,” (5) “and if it comes to hand” (6) they will do harm to the “most Holy Mary.” (7) “They are all life enjoyers,”: (8) of religion.

(1.) This is a humorous way of stating he has never attended church.

(2.) Fijate, is a sort of idiomatic expression, and it is used to further impress what follows.

(3.) This is a shortening of a sentence. The meaning is: “I cannot sit at the table and eat.”

(4.) This is somewhat similar to one of the doctrines of the witch doctors in Ybor City. They will (so they say) feel the same pains and sufferings of the person they wish to cure. By transmitting the spirit of the sick person into their own body they will go through the convulsions, pains, etc. suffered by the patient. They hold that the person will be cured in this way. Several people believe implicitly in this as they say they have witnessed these cures with their own eyes.

(5.) Golpo de pecho. As expressed here it refers to the manner in which a priest prays while gently striking his breast and says: “Through my fault, Through my fault, through

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my grievous fault.” It is an idiomatic expression used, more or less, by all the Spanish speaking people in Ybor City. It has not the same meaning as above it is used to show that a certain person is very boastful.

(6.) Si vien a mano. This is an expression commonly used to mean “handy.” In the above case it means “if necessary.”

(7.) This saint is very much invoked or named in Ybor City. Due to its continual usage, it has now come to mean “everybody.”

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(8.) Vivador. Although the correct meaning of the word is a thrifty or economical person; in Ybor City it has lost its original meaning entirely, and is used in a contemptuous manner. Its meaning is a human parasite.

I remember that at the corner here a poor negro died “who did not have a place to fall dead.” (1) Among several we made a collection, but the preacher did not give “neither a bit.” (2) We were all at the place where he was buried, under a sun that cracked the stones. The preacher stayed at a certain distance under the shade of a tree. When the negro was already buried, he came and said: “ashes you are, ashes you will be, through the centuries of the centuries, amen.” He only said these words. At the same time he clapped on his hat and left “open for Hiers.” (3) If it had been for a rich man, he would have said a sermon of two hours, which would have put one to sleep.

My amusement is fishing. “Now that” (4) each one has his amusements. There are those, who by throwing a stick up in the air, amuse themselves.

I have only “thrown one or two gray hairs to the air,” (5) but nearly always I have led a tranquil life.

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I remember that I and several more would go to Fort Tampa to fish, and every day we would catch a shark. At 5:15 on the dot they would come in troops.

(1.) Tras de [que?] [caerse?] nuerto. This is a peculiar saying used here to designate a very poor or needy person.

(2.) Ni pizca, as used in Ybor City means “nothing.”

(3.) Abierto por Hiers. This expression came in use when Hiers was running for sheriff. When a person wished to express how strong he was for Hiers, he would say: “Estoy abierto por Hiers.” This expression was afterwards changed somewhat, and came to be “abierto por Hiers,” he has given it the latter meaning, which means running very fast, or “left in a hurry.”

(4.) Ahora que. This expression is used to mean although, or however.

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(5.) Tirar una o des canitas al aire. This expression of Spanish origin, means to have a good time. When ever a man has an affair or is going to have an affair with a woman, he generally says: “voy a tirar una canita al aire” (literally: “I am going to throw a gray hair to the air”.) This expression is used in a humorous manner.

It really seemed that they had a clock, as they did not vary a single minute. One would entrap himself every time. I would wrap the rope around my arm, and would pull, holding on to a pole, until I would draw his head from the water. Then my companion would “sledge-hammer his head with an “iron bar” (1) that “not even the Chinese doctor” (2) could revive him. But one day when I caught a shark which was as big as a porch, he pulled so hard that he “almost carried my arm.” (3) The rope remained marked on my arm for one week. The pull he gave me “was not for play.” (4) “For the (5) matches!” Since then I do not catch any more sharks.

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I also remember a fox which we started to hunt. You can ask this of any of my friends. You may laugh at this story, but it is true. Every time we stopped to rest, the fox would stop also and would look at us from afar. It really looked “like it wanted to take our hair.” (6) Finally at nightfall we were able to corral him in a rabbit's cave. We closed up the cave and left. The following day we came back, and my friend fired with his gun, and a rattlesnake came out; and when we thought the fox was coming out, a rabbit came out. Finally we were able to take the fox out, which we placed in a box. It seems that the rattlesnake, the rabbit and the fox lived there in the greatest harmony.

(1.) Wandariago. This is a word that has been changed so as to give more force to the original word “mandarria” (a sledge hammer). This is a local expression, and is equivalent to: “My companion gave him a terrible blow on the head with an iron bar (similar to the blow given by a sledge hammer.)

(2.) Ni el medico chino. This expression as used in Ybor City signifies that a man or animal is past all cure or help. It was originated in 8 Cuba because of many good cures effected by a Chinese doctor. In Ybor City it is used very loosely.

(3.) Por nade me lleva el brazo. The equivalent for this is: “Almost wrenched my arm.”

(4.) Ne fue para [jeego?]. This is a colloquial expression which by its contrast with the word “play” means “Was very terrible.”

(5.) Para los [fosforos?]. This is another colloquial expression which is used in this case as an exclamation to give extra force to the thought that has gone before. Its equivalent in English would be: “To the mischief with him”

(6.) Nos [queria?] tomar el pelo. This expression, as used here, is equivalent to: “He wanted to get our goat.”

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My friend then placed a copper necklace around the neck of the fox. But the fox was too clever, and after reaching the house, he broke the box and escaped.

Some time later, while I was hunting with several friends, I saw the same fox. I knew him immediately because he had the copper necklace. We gave chase until he entered the same cave. We fired into the cave; the fox came out and we killed him. At the same time the same time the same rabbit came out. "By my mother (1) chico (2)," I knew him because of a small back spot (pintica) (3) that he had on the tail.

I also remember a very large lagoon which started in Grand Central and took all this part back here. They had taken that as a dump pile, and all the shore was filled up with cans. It seems that an alligator had the custom of coming there to eat the refuse.

One day I went to this lagoon, but it seems that the alligator saw me first. I had my back turned to him when I heard a terrible noise among the cans.

I looked backward and I see "that piece (4) " of alligator who was after me. I dropped the gun, and ran as I have never ran before in my life. I did not 9 stop running until I had reached home. "When I say (5) to give:" "long strides" (6) there is no one who can beat me. I do not know if it is true, but they say that those animals run very much.

(1.) Por mi madre. This is an oath employed more or less by everyone in Ybor City. Its equivalent in English would be something like "my goodness" or "By God."

(2.) Chico. The literal translation of this word is "small boy;" but as employed in Ybor City it is similar to the American way of saying "Old Chap." This is one of the most common words used here.

(3.) This is a diminutive of the word "pinta." In true Castilian the word is spelled "pintita."

(4.) [??]. This colloquial expression means "very large."

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(5.) Cuando yo digo. This expression is used at times to mean: "When I commence taking" long strides. —

(6.) Zancajadas. This word was originally "zancadas," however, it is hardly known by its true name, as practically everyone uses the word "zancajadas" (long strides.)

Here and in Ybor City there are many slang expressions. As an example: one will ask another how he is, and he answers: "If the situation continues I am going to "jolapear."

The people who are very poor and have nothing to eat are called "empty house rats." When they are very bad off, they are called "hardware house rats." (if they want to eat, they must eat nails.)

Also when one meets a friend and asks him what he is doing, he answers: "I am in the air, old chap, like the President," because the President is always talking through the air (the radio.).

(1.) Jolapear. This comes from the American words of "hold up."